

Newsletter One

April 2012

Here are some items that I thought might be of interest to people who care about liberal education, the classics, the humanities and other good things.

If you'd like to subscribe to subsequent issues, let me know at wrconnor1@gmail.com. Thanks!

Bob Connor

Is liberal education only for the elite?

The question hits a nerve, perhaps especially because the educational (not just economic) gap between rich and poor is dramatically increasing, as was documented by Sabrina Tavernise in the New York Times on February 10, 2012:

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/education/education-gap-grows-between-rich-and-poor-studies-show.html?_r=1&ref=sabrinatavernise

The question of elite education also underlies a lively discussion on the place of skills in liberal education. Ezra Klein argued on Rob Reich's blog that the flow of graduates of selective universities into finance and consulting jobs resulted from the failure of the liberal arts to teach the skills they need. "It's not the massive recruiting efforts finance and consulting companies make, and it's not the high salaries": <http://www.stanford.edu/group/reichresearch/cgi-bin/site/2012/02/20/is-the-liberal-arts-to-blame-for-sending-so-many-stanford-students-into-finance-consulting/>

Is a liberal education only for the elite. A resounding No from Annie Bezbatchenko has some cogent remarks in a Washington Post blog for 22nd February 2012 :

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/college-inc/post/liberal-learning-only-for-the-elite/2012/02/21/gIQA0IXJTR_blog.html#pagebreak

I read all this with Debra Satz "The Liberal Reach: Teaching Humanities to the Poor " in Dissent 2004 pp. 72 – 75 in mind. She shows how much can be gained from reaching beyond the ivied walls; <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=403>

But how much do they learn? Richard Arum has now followed up on the disturbing critique he and Josipa Roksa published last year, *Academically Adrift* (Chicago 2011) with a sharper longitudinal study: <http://highered.src.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Improving-Undergraduate-Learning-2011.pdf> The good news is that the traditional liberal arts and sciences have a strong, demonstrable record of developing such long-lasting capacities as critical thinking .

The missing term, 'Learning': Arum's work points out widespread problems in the quality of American higher education. But that's not a word we hear much. – not from the Department of Education, at least, where “attainment” and “cost containment” are getting needed attention but nary a word about student learning. The effort is being made to change that, especially by the New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability. About a hundred colleges and universities have now joined its President's Alliance. That's great progress, but where are the other 3,000 or more institutions? Where's yours?
http://www.newleadershipalliance.org/what_we_do/presidents_alliance/

Getting up to speed on Assessment: Much of the best work and some of the most heated arguments in higher education concern the use of systematic methods of assessing student learning. The best way to get up to speed on these issues: the website of the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment: <http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/>

What's happening to British Higher Education: Jan Parker's electronic Arts and Humanities in Higher Education brings an international perspective to theory, research and practice: <http://ahh.sagepub.com>

Mary Beard's essay “Do the Classics Have a Future?” in the New York Review of January 17 2012
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/jan/12/do-classics-have-future/> LINK is anything but the usual narrative of decline. She makes a strong case for the continued vitality of the Greek and Roman classics, *but* points out the precarious state of developing the next generation of expert interpreters of the field.

'Before a Court of the Shipwrecked': Mary Beard's essay resonates with an essay of my own “We Must Call the Classics before a Court of the Shipwrecked.” It can be found at
http://www.wrobertconnor.com/uploads/3/3/5/8/3358534/cw_104.4_offprint_connor.pdf

Good reading: These two books arrived in the same mail, thereby leaving me like a donkey between two bales of hay:

Andrew Delbanco College: What it was, is and should be (Princeton, 2012).

Christopher P. Loss Between Citizens and the State (Princeton, 2012).

Quotable “ After a life of loving the old, by natural law I turned old myself.” Donald Hall “Out the Window” The New Yorker January 23, 2012, p. 42.